THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

The Beggar God - - by Maxwell Anderson

Groups of Poems by Francis Carlin, Lydia Gibson, Louise Townsend Nicholl, Maxwell Bodenheim, David Osborne Hamilton, Miriam Vedder -

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The Beggar God

I

YOU saw him under foot where the traffic meets,
Crouched where a line of beggars dead and gone has sat;
He cursed a little, shivered and cursed in turn
And looked with blind eyes into his empty hat;
Worn raw he was by the current of wills eternally passing,
By the roughshod desires that cut their paths on the flags,
With breaking the scornful dust of unseen departure
And shifting away from the cold stone in his rags.
Damn the city, damn the men with money who gave him little,
The women with money—he said—who gave him less . . .
There will be a wringing of hands, he said again; there will be a great crying;
Gods are not mocked . . . and again, Somebody pays for this.

II

The God Mutters:

FEW are so low they have not trampled on
The beggar god—beggar and god and blind.
He has been begging here time out of mind
Without an answer, and the crowd is gone.

He has forborne so long, and none has turned
To answer, he will rise at last and fling
An arm about the arch, and thundering
The city will come down. Cities have burned,

O passerby, cities have come to end
Suddenly with the flood-tides of the seas;
Surely the gods end cities when they please,
And I am a god; and blind, knowing no friend.

III

He Gathers His Wrath About Him:

THE love of peoples is a little thing,
A little thing to a god who has his will,
He will put his love out of mind; they have all forgotten,
They have long forgotten, but he remembers still.
He remembers, looking out through a starless midnight,
Multitudes grooving the pavement all day long;
What have they done with their days, with the power in their hands?
They have founded an empire, they have ended a song,
They have spat on his feet as he was brooding,
They have given him anger to clothe despair,
They have not known him, have had no pity on darkness,
They have lifted dust to settle on his hair.
Oh, a god is long forgiving, a god is merciful,
He must be merciful, must no less be just,
He could forgive the bitter words, the trampling,
He could forgive the dust;
But the cold eyes that beat upon him colder
Than the cold wind, this causeway barren of friends,
This rush of feet on hard and mirthless errands,
This hurry to envious ends,
These he could not forgive. It were better silenced
With an answer tidal, final, beyond recall,
Better to urge the sea above the lintels,
Better to sink it all.

IV

He Broods Over His Vengeance:

UNDER a slate dusk morning
Looking out and down he can see
Breakers rolled straight over grey-black transluscence

To split at the tops of towers.
Through the wavering midnight of waters,
The troubled moving of soundless pellucid tide,
Quivering ledges of windows in long lines
Reach down, drowsing, pulsing heavily, far down
Beyond the flooded floors, the solid weight of cold,
To a corner where the dust is laid at last.
The furnaces are out, the fires are dead,
The grates have drunk salt water;
Dead are the men who tended them, and dead
The men for whom they tended them, and dead
Sweet-hearts and wives, hard-hearted, all this city,
All who have passed him by and left him there.
Surely the gods end cities . . . *It was the beggar god*
(O cry, call aloud, run crying)
It was the beggar god
Has done this! He was never assuaged!
O you who were warmed and fed, who gave scanty offering,
The city is drowned by the beggar who sat at the crossways!
He was not pleased! It will not rise again!

They were swept in with curses; he saw their hands
Lifted like grain; the lights were out, the walls were rocked with cries—
Let then the news be carried: the city has fallen
To the sea and the god's will, it is given over
To the ocean's spawn, blind fish of the very deep
Inhabit here; they shall be known in the streets.
But nothing is altered save for the coming in of the sea
Here where land was too dear and blood too cheap,
Here where the blind man sat in the market place,
Breathing the dust and corroding the light with dreams.
As for the rest . . . they may live.

Maxwell Anderson

Forecast

IN years to come when I shall see you, say
In concert hall, or better still in church,
(A church would suit the gods' ironic way
Of laughter), with your wife, a slim young birch
Of a daughter, and the boy with your brown eyes
That smoulder while they dream, I then shall walk
The road of memory, wary and lately wise,
Gauging my strength well for ghosts that stalk.

And I shall live again that little while
In which I knew your heart on holiday,
And trembled to your longing; and I shall smile
To think, as grave I kneel and seem to pray,
That you appear a solid citizen
And I a spinster unaware of men.

Mary Dean

Not With Bright Poppies

NOT with bright poppies and crimson,
Not with cadmium and spectrum violet
Shall I approach today:
Not as yesterday, with ecstasy
Of orange, viridian, blue—
Nor with joy for the sunlight:

But with smooth white
And the quiet ghastliness of black on white:
With the agony of taut lines
And the assuagement of angles;
With the interpretation of torment
And the brittle satisfaction of design.

The Beggar

YOU follow beauty like a mendicant
As a cheap clerk approaches a prostitute:
You wheedle her and beg for favors
And praise her for stooping.
What do you know of beauty? Massive as mountains,
Complicated as a great dynamo,
Simple as the horizon in mid-ocean,
Not to be wheedled, not charitable, not to be flattered.

Plunder

OUT of black nights and terrifying days
I have brought plunder—
A leaden hour, carved in mysterious ways;
Moments of respite like the beads they told
In Buddhist temples in the days of old;
A jewel made of questioning and wonder
And a black hour of fear, shot with strange gold,
Writhen grotesquely, and split half asunder.

Lydia Gibson

Passing at Night

OUT went the sun.
And night
Burst on us with her myriad stars.
Rumbling through the pale sea
Beneath the Southern Cross,
We passed the old "Ventura" wallowing south,
And were alone again,
Upon the mirror of the sea,
Hull down among the stars.

Archie Binns

Candles Burning

I LOVE to measure Time by candles burning
So that the hours, flaming high and white,
Are as a steady bridge across the turning
Of circling day into its circling night.
Sand-grains drip slowly down an hour-glass,
A shadow moves on dials of the sun—
Both these tell sadly how all things must pass;
My candles say Eternity's begun.
Life is not dropping sand nor moving shade;
Life turns unceasingly to quiet flame.
Even the hour-glass is rhythmic made,
And sunlight gives the shadowed dial name.
There is no Time. The measuring candles show
Only how swift to flame the hours go.

The Old Turntable

THE train flashed by it suddenly
But there was given us to see
A round place where an engine used to turn,
Grown thick and green and feathery with fern.

This was a proposition to be proved, —
A strong diameter which moved
And came full circle, bearing splendid weight,
Carrying engines as its easy freight.
Now it is just a figure drawn,
A circle with a line across.
Motion for many summers has been gone;
The rusted rails are crusted green with moss.

There was a moment given us to see
That fine old table, desolate and free,
Now filled up, in its idle hours,
Like a great bowl, with flowers.

Louise Townsend Nicholl

Two Sonnets to My Wife

I

BECAUSE her voice is Schönberg in a dream
In which his harshness plays with softer keys
This does not mean that it is void of ease
And cannot gather to a strolling gleam.
Her voice is full of manners, and they seem
To place a masquerade on thought and tease
Its strength until it finds that it has knees,
And whimsically leaves its heavy scheme.

Discords can be the search of harmony
For worlds that lie beyond the reach of poise
And must be captured with abandoned hands.
The music of my wife strives to be free,
And often takes a light unbalanced voice
While madly walking over thoughtful lands.

II

MY wife relents to life and does not speak
Each moment with a deft and rapid note.
Sometimes a clumsy wierdness finds her throat
And ushers in a music that is weak
And bargains with the groping of her heart.
But even then she plays with graver tones
That do not sell themselves to laughs and moans,
But seek the counsel of a deeper art.

She drapes her loud emotions in a shroud
Of glistening thought that waves above their dance,
And sometimes parts to show their startled eyes.
The depths of mind within her have not bowed
To sleek emotion with its amorous glance.
She slaps its face and laughs at its surprise!

Maxwell Bodenheim

A Child's Grace

DEAR GOD Who lives beyond the sky
Within a House where angels fly,
Bless this table where I sit
And all of us surrounding it.

Bless my spoon, knife, fork and plate,
My saucer and the cup, its mate,
That serve me as when Mary's few
Bright table-things attended You.

Bless the water and the food,
And bless us all so, being good,
Our names may be on napkin-rings
Where angels set Your table-things.

The Shambles

'TWAS in the early Autumn
When light as well as leaf
Takes on the guinea-gold that fades
From off the gathered sheaf;
That I went down to Drogheda
With a shout, at every step,
At the lambs I drove to Drogheda—
Old, red Drogheda—
Behind the growl of Shep.

The wind above the pastures
Had cloudy sheep to fold,
And all of them were raddled, faith,
As though they had been sold;
As I went down to Drogheda
A-whistling, step by step,
The tune of "Bloody Drogheda"—
Blood-red Drogheda—
Behind the whine of Shep.

My sorrow on the shambles
  In the town where little ones
Were driven on to Cromwell's sword
  Before his barking guns!
But Oh! the gold of Drogheda
  That clinked at every step,
As I came home from Drogheda—
Old, red Drogheda—
  Behind the grin of Shep.

Gosling Brook

NORWALK, where is Gosling Brook?
Is it bright again, or must I look
Where someone found it—
Deep in the earth with a pipe around it?

Norwalk, where is Gosling Brook?
(I mind the day my fishing hook
Was a crooked brier
Bent, perhaps, in the sumac's fire.)
Where are the ducks whose squadron hailed
The fleet of goslings far outsailed?
Are the bathing sparrows still about
Terrifying the minnow-trout?

Norwalk, where is Gosling Brook?
Where is the fern that, like a crook,
Stood bending over
The wooly foam and the lamb-white clover?
Where is the stream that shuddered when
It passed the ruins in the glen?
Do the ghostly house's creaking walls
Still nurse their British cannon-balls?

Norwalk, where is Gosling Brook?
(I mind the night I leaned to look
At the moon's white shoulder
Stooping under the bridge's boulder.)
And where are all the dragon-flies
That sewed up children's ears and eyes?
Are the water-beetles still alive
Near reeds from which they used to dive?

Norwalk, where is Gosling Brook?
Who may know unless they look
Where someone found it—
Deep in the earth with a pipe around it?

Francis Carlin

Of This Last Night

OF this last night together, we'll not waste
One hour of beauty in a lover's grief,
Since for our love eternity is brief,
Infinity itself too narrow spaced.
Yet all earth's motions seem tonight in haste;
The plunging sea that lashes at the reef,
The wind that whirls this first-blown autumn leaf—
Even the marching stars seem swifter paced.
Against the rush of time we set our love,
Daring all floods to sweep this night away;
Till even the stars halt motionless above,
The hurried wind falls to a whispered breath,
The fading primrose falters in its death—
And wheeling earth holds back the coming day.

Constance Goodrich

Entreaty

CALL down a falling star to split the roof,
Call in some thing with horns, some jagged hoof,
Some furry back that crawls!

O for a wind to carry off the door,
A thistle strong enough to crack the floor,
A moon to melt the walls!

The Circle

DRIVE in the ditch and set the horses free!
Dismount, O driver, let the gilt wheels rust.
Sit here and break the whip across your knee,
And watch the endless throng move through the dust.

Although they call to you as they ride by
You must not jeer, or weep for them in vain,
Or lift your voice in joy to join their cry—
Watch well, for they will pass, and pass again.

David Osborne Hamilton

Silent

THEY crossed the outer threshold. Neither said
The single word that both had sought to say,
A word that would have left them comforted,
And healed an odd bewilderment away:
Two who had found within the house of time
The same immortal moment . . . Strangers still,
They parted in the only fashion fit;
And the white stars came out beyond the hill,
And in the house the evening lamps were lit.

The Last

YOU will not find a beggar at your door,
Crouching and snivelling in the evening light,
Praying a bed and shelter from the night:
Beggars come not so often, anymore.

Nor will you find the guest for whom you wait,
When you rise quickly, and undo the lock,
Thinking you hear a once-familiar knock:
Guests are less frequent when the hour is late.

Only a stranger will be standing there,
Seeking, not entrance, but the way to go
To some far house. And that you will not know;
Nor why his eyes are heavy with despair.

Miriam Vedder

Illusion

GREY leaves are listless on the boughs,
The swans slow and the pigeons drowse;
The blue sinks in the sculptured lake
Where the young moon curves an amber flake. . . .

O do not touch me now, not now!
Your scarf is like a rope of fire. . . .
Grey leaves are pendant on the bough;
It is so with hope and with desire. . . .

Serene . . . so let our pulses keep
The measure of the cricket's song
Closing the dusk with chords of sleep
Through rhythms delicately strong. . . .

O do not touch me now, not now!
This hour that silences the birds;
The seared leaves quiver on the bough
And the sky breaks into golden words.

George O'Neil

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The Poetry of a Standardized Life

AN old man sitting over in Europe on the end of his life sends forth a curious blast of optimism with regard to America.

"Europe is finished, and the age of American domination . . . has begun," says Georg Brandes. He means this to include poetry as well as trade balances. "America," he says, "is in the same stage of development at which Florence and Venice and Athens were before they blossomed forth. I see no reason for supposing that America will not become, as they did, a great center of art and learning."

These remarks will be grinned at by certain critics here. They find America mechanistic, dull-spirited, illiberal. They have been asking for some time—Mr. Van Wyck Brooks has put the question among others—if we can expect any artist to thrive here. They have suggested that young poets and novelists and artists are likely to turn from professional baseball, omnipresent advertising, the college yell, the standardized short-story, and President Harding to seek ideas and beauty across the sea. Mr. St. John Ervine, arriving last spring from Great Britain, rather confirmed their opinion. Tacitly admitting that we were able now to be different literarily from England, he feared we were unable to be different from one another. He pointed out that our standardization was as much of architecture, clothes, manners, magazines and ideas as of breakfast foods or bathtubs. He found our life a mold dangerously difficult for the individual

genius to break. His tone was echoed recently by someone writing in the New York *Nation,* who believes that "our hope is in youth, in the liberation of youth from the oppression of gross custom, from the tyranny of sport and narrow correctness."

So far as poets are concerned, it seems odd that anyone—whether putting full faith in Mr. Brandes or not—should hold with Mr. Brooks and Mr. Ervine. These critics seem somewhat to misunderstand the function of a poet. Poets are interested chiefly in the changing emotional expression that earth and the human ways of using earth draw or force from men. Their powers being equal, poets will sing best where life in some form or other and for some reason or other burns most intensely. Life in America is beyond doubt standardized. Whether it is more standardized in the largest sense than Homer's Achaea, Dante's Italy, or Milton's England seems to me to be a debatable question. But the standardization it shows can after all be interpreted only as a sign of rather passionate surrender of America to mechanistic civilization. That civilization, I think, burns most fiercely here of anywhere. I have no great love for it in its present stage, but the world has either accepted or is accepting it. To live in the midst of its most highly colored manifestation, to watch the most significant—because the most profound—effect of the age on men, seems to me an advantage.

It is one which the poet in America enjoys. Europe is still divided between the old and the new. America is undivided. The tragedies and comedies of the new race—the men and women of steam-heated apartments, factories, steamships and airplanes—are sharper in New York or Chicago than in London or Paris. The critic who advises the American poet to leave New York for London proposes a shift from the tenth row center of the orchestra to one of the balconies.

He also asks the poet as a performer to leave his best possible audience. Standardization—whether Achaean or Restoration or American—means community of interest. There will be millions of listeners in America for words touching vitally any part of that standardization which is America. *The Spoon River Anthology* proved this for poetry before *Main Street* proved it for prose. The American poet had better stay at home. America may not be capable yet of dominance in any art, but the drama of modern men at grapple with the problems of a new civilization is more vivid here than elsewhere, and of this drama modern poetry will be made.

Frank Ernest Hill.

Treacle Tears for Keats

The Keats Memorial Volume; New York and London, John Lane.

EXACTLY the same thing is wrong with the Keats Memorial Volume that was wrong with a meeting of the redoubtable Poetry Society of America which was given over last spring to the celebration of the Keats centennial. That meeting, as a friend remarked after it was all over, was obscene.

No definite recollection of the proceedings remains with me. There was an interminable number of bad poems read aloud with deep feeling, a continual drip of death-bed comment, a pervading moony misery somehow entangled with Roman marbles, nightingales, and names writ in water, to say nothing of incongruous English and matinee emotion. It was a camp meeting, a debauch, a typical session of the Poetry Society.

The Memorial volume has more of the pedant in it and proportionately less of the amateur, but the spirit is practically identical. Here are bad verse, inane chatter, unnecessary reminiscences, collegiate analysis. Here, too, are a few sensible observations, fairly drowned in mediocrity. Some of it is unbelievably puerile—to be appreciated it must be seen. Two features alone make the book worth owning—they are the facsimile of the *Ode to a Nightingale* and the newly published letter from the collection of Amy Lowell; this last is indeed one of the most interesting and revealing of all Keats' letters.

It is too much to ask that the great dead be suitably honored. It has never been done, perhaps never will be. Certainly it wasn't done in this case.

Maxwell Anderson.

Introducing Irony

Introducing Irony, by Maxwell Bodenheim. Boni & Liveright, New York.

IRONY delicately handled, which lacks the inherent cheapness of smartness, and that rests on a deep and at times tender knowledge of life, is a valuable and just now a much needed note in American Poetry. We have at the present time a plethora of lady and boy lyricists, of the pretty and of the obscure, and it has been an exhilarating experience to read the manuscript of Mr. Bodenheim's forthcoming book, the title of which is justified both by the style and the content, for the author seems to be the very man who put the iron in irony.

Mr. Bodenheim's irony is not a sneer at American life; he is genuinely sorry for some aspects of it, even at times sorry for himself, although not luxuriantly so, as numbers of our poets often are, for his pity is always a sword tempered by the rare but strengthening alloy of humor, and the weapon of his words seldom fails to glitter.

This poet stands afar off from the strident, confident Whitmanesque school that blows the affectedly virile fanfares of our glorious democracy. He dares in his book to point out that most of our cherished lights are a darkness, that our cities are not always beautiful and I suspect doubts the benignity of our machine made civilization and its ultimate utility to the individual. The poems in this collection will be distressing to the orthodox, if they can understand them, and confusing to the liberal, for their author has touched on perhaps the only great theme left virgin to modern poetry, the theme of despair. To the complacent they will be anathema.

For instance, Mr. Bodenheim does not find Chicago to be as inspiring as does Mr. Sandburg. The fact that it possesses skyscrapers does not cause him to effervesce, even the morning visit of the milkman, who, Mr. Sandburg assures us, is such a fine fellow, or was it the iceman, cannot entirely comfort him for places like North Clark Street. To Maxwell Bodenheim its houses

> "Tame and ghastly coffins
> Display their shamefaced grays and reds
> Against the passing vividness of morning.
> From the base of these huge coffins
> Men and women walk
> Like briskly servile automata."

Clark streets with their "briskly servile *automata*" are what is wrong with America to-day and Mr. Bodenheim's style is well calculated to drive such pictures home. He sees the sardonic humor of the inanimate. The book is in both rhymed and free verse, strangely well done. I would like to say more about this poet's word craftmanship. One of the best things about his volume is that it does not contain a single poem about a tree and has nothing else wooden in it.

Poetry has recently employed a cowboy to review Masefield's *Right Royal;* proceeding on the same theory, the editors of *The Measure* should have secured a plumber to review *Introducing Irony* (Mr. Bodenheim might say, "Perhaps they have"), for the poems in his book are cleverly laid and undermining pipe lines which will manage to introduce a little vitriol into the standard oil of everyday American life.

Hervey Allen

Contributors

MARY DEAN, by birth a Tennessean, has lived in New York, Boston, and the southwest. She is now at Biltmore, N. C.

LYDIA GIBSON is a sculptress and painter who has exhibited in Paris and San Francisco. She lives in New York City.

ARCHIE BINNS is studying at Stanford University, California.

MAXWELL BODENHEIM is well known to readers of poetry in America. His most recent volume is reviewed in the present issue of *The Measure*.

FRANCIS CARLIN, Irish but now a New Yorker, is the author of several books of poems, including *A Cairn of Stars*.

DAVID OSBORNE HAMILTON is represented in the Yale University Press's Younger Poets series by a little volume called *Four Gardens*. He is studying now at the Art Students' League in New York City.

Some of MIRIAM VEDDER's earlier poems—she is a Wellesley, 1916, graduate—were published without her consent by a young man calling himself "Dorian Hope." These in *The Measure* appear with her permission.

A New Associate Editor

JOSEPH AUSLANDER has been elected an associate editor of *The Measure*. Recently an instructor at Harvard, he is now travelling and studying in Europe.

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